DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 069 EA 013 557

AUTHOR Edson, Sakre K.
TITLE "If They Can, I Can:" Questionning the Stereotype of the Non-Aspiring Woman in Administration.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, CA, April 13-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Qualifications; *Administrators; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Employed Women; Equal Opportunities (Jobs); *Females; Sex Bias; *Sex Discrimination; *Sex Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS Oregon

ABSTRACT

A common assumption is that women do not aspire to become public school administrators, but a two-part study in Oregon on women who have actively pursued careers in public school administration contradicts this supposition. The data were collected from questionnaire responses and in-depth interviews. The typical female aspirant in Oregon possesses both a certificate for administration and a principal's endorsement, has served numerous years as a teacher, and has had some administrative experience. However, 71 percent of the respondents have faced significant barriers in pursuit of their goals, most notably lack of experience and discrimination. They believe they have not been given the opportunity to gain the necessary experience because women are not considered appropriate candidates for administrative jobs. Yet the women in the study have continued to seek positions as principals because they have confidence in their abilities and they know that administration is what they want. (Author/WD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED201069

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"IF THEY CAN, I CAN:"
QUESTIONNING THE STEREOTYPE OF THE NON-ASPIRING WOMAN IN ADMINISTRATION

A Paper Presented to the
1981 Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research
Association

by

Sakre K. Edson
Research Associate
University of Oregon

EA 013 557

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. K. Edson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I address my comments today to the much publicized, often well-documented notion that women do not aspire to become public school administrators. We are all familiar with studies about female teachers who choose to remain in the classroom rather than pursue an administrative position (even though they may be qualified to do so) (McMillan, 1975; Mansergh, 1976; Krchniak, 1978; Newman, 1980; Weber et.al., 1980). We are also aware of studies which note that female doctoral students in educational administration, like their male counterparts, typically do not use their degrees to further careers in public school administration, but rather pursue employment as consultants, researchers or governmental service employees (Oller [Edson], 1979a & b, 1978; Reynolds, 1978; Mc Carthy et. al., 1979). And certainly at first glance, the national figures of women employed in public school line positions can lead to the conclusion that perhaps women are not pursuing such positions (Fishel and Pottker, 1974; Gross and Trask, 1976; Clement et. al., 1977; Stockard et. al., 1980). But are these facts the whole picture about women and their aspirations in public school administration? Is the stereotype of the non-aspiring woman that results from these studies the correct one?

I began to question this stereotype six years ago when, in the course of my research about women and administration, I continued to meet numbers of women at state and national conferences who wanted to know how to get ahead in the field of administration. These articulate and often well-qualified women prompted me to pursue a study which focused specifically on women who did want to become administrators and who, in fact, were actively aiming for career goals in public school administration. I was curious what these women might have to say to us as opposed to the women educators in general that tended to be addressed in earlier studies. Although I am currently conducting a national study about women aspirants under the auspices of the Ford Foundation which I hope to pre-

sent to you next year, the bases of my talk today are the descriptive findings from a study I did in Oregon in 1979-80.

To find candidates to participate in the two-part Oregon study, I communicated with four groups of women throughout the state who were working toward a first principalship: women in certification programs at the two state universities offering principal certification; women at the same two universities engaged in doctoral programs in educational administration; women participants in the 1978 Oregon Women in Educational Administration Conference[1]; and finally, women listed in the Directory of Administrative Candidates of the Oregon Network.[2]

After 400 names of possible candidates were obtained, each person was sent a questionnaire on which 116 respondents indicated they were actively seeking a principalship as one of their career goals. Following the collection of this quantifiable data, 21 of the 116 respondents were chosen for in-depth interviews about their career experiences to date. These interviewees, selected on the basis of demographic characteristics such as age, race, marital status, and years of experience in teaching and in administration, represented the broad range of women within the state who aspired to principalships.

The statistics quoted in this paper come from the questionnaire responses, and the quotes are verbatim statements taken from the interviews. Due to the brief time we have today, I will cover only three parts of the study results: first, a presentation of the composite picture of the "typical" female aspirant in Oregon; second, a discussion of the barriers these women reportedly faced in

---

[1]The Oregon Women in Educational Administration (OWEA) is a statewide support group for women in education, both aspirants and current administrators. Originally conceived and funded through the Sex Equity Project (a Women's Educational Equity Grant), the organization now runs at the grassroots level on volunteer time and money.

[2]The Oregon Network was a clearinghouse for employers offering administrative positions and for females and males seeking such jobs. Originally part of the Sex Equity Project, it is now operated, in part, but the Northwest Women in Educational Administration.

their search for administrative careers; and third, an examination of the motivational forces that led the aspirants to consider a principalship and to persist in their efforts to attain that position.

The Typical Aspirant

The "typical" Oregon female aspirant was 38 years old (the range was from 25 to 57 years old), Caucasian (97%), and grew up in a medium-sized town (27%). Her mother had a high school education (32%), while her father's educational level was typically somewhat lower. The aspirant's mother kept house (67%), while her father held jobs such as owning a small business (18%), was a skilled craftsperson (16%), or was an unskilled or semi-skilled worker (12%). Unlike previous studies, the female aspirant was most likely not the oldest or only child in her family (Paddock, 1977; Hennig and Jardin, 1977). Basically, she viewed her childhood background as solidly middle-class (53%).

As an adult, the aspirant still considered herself middle class (53%) or upper middle-class (41%), perhaps reflecting her marital status. She was married (53% for the first time, 16% for the second time) to a man most likely to be a certified public school employee (20%), a professional (11%), or an executive manager (16%). They had two school-age children (53%) and lived in the state's largest city.

Her educational background and preparation for administration included a master's degree from an Oregon institution (97%). She had certification to teach (with nine years of experience at either the elementary or secondary level), as well as administrative certification (63%) and a principal's endorsement (42%). She typically had 3.8 years of administrative experience as a chairperson, a coordinator or a specialist. She was currently employed at a school district (36%) as a teacher (29%) or as a pre-line administrator (28%), in addition to keeping house. Finally, she was also likely to be taking classes (36%) at a

city university (71%) toward further administrative certification (71%).

Briefly, let me point out two critical issues highlighted in these statistics. First, let us look at the level of certification these women possess and second, the amount of administrative experience they have acquired. With regard to administrative credentials, women are often found lacking when compared with their male peers (Schmuck, 1976). In Oregon, however, women aspirants often already had their certificates for administration (63%) and principal's endorsements (42%). Aspirants were very aware of the importance of formal schooling in furthering their careers. Those who did not have certification in hand were often working on ways to obtain the necessary credentials. Many respondents said they knew women were thought to be unprepared in this area, and they underscored this concern in the interviews. For example, one newly hired vice principal said:

> I think it is critical to get your education out of the way. I think my strongest asset is that I have all the education for a standard credential. I can go anywhere from here to Timbuktu, because I've got the education.

Another area where women usually lack the necessary qualifications is in actual administrative experience. While Oregon aspirants had numerous years of teaching experience, a large percentage (76%) also indicated administrative experience at one or more pre-principal positions, ranging from internships to teaching principalships. Table 1 describes the administrative experience at each level and the average amount of experience in years for each.

The figures indicate that although women who want to be principals have more experience than previously though, much of it still tends to center at the support level rather than in line positions. Many aspirants try to overcome this deficiency, as one newly hired department chairperson explains:

> I give myself two to three years in this position. During that time I hope to accumulate a doctorate along with the years of administrative experience and the added years of teaching. There shouldn't be too many excuses after that for not hiring me.

TABLE 1

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCES OF

WOMEN ASPIRANTS* (n=116)

Position	% and number of Aspirants in study		Average years in position
Administrative Assistant of Intern	9%	(11)	3.1 years
Specialist, Coordinator, Dean Chairperson or Supervisor	35	(41)	3.8
Director	15	(17)	1.3
Vice Principal	16	(18)	2.5
Teaching Principal	1	(1)	1.0

*Percents do not total 100% because some respondents indicated experience at several levels.

For those still struggling to gain the necessary pre-requisite experience, frustration is common. As expressed by one teacher in a conversation with an administrator: "How can I get the necessary experience if you're not willing to give it to me?"

Barriers to Career Progress

Although may aspirants were actively preparing themselves for managerial careers, 71% of the total number believed certain barriers were a hinderance to the attainment of their goals. Table 2 describes these barriers and their relative importance as reported by the aspirants. Traditional female barriers such as family responsibilities and lack of confidence rank low in the frequency with which they were cited. The two barriers most often reported were lack of experience and discrimination. Upon close examination of the data, we can see that the two are bound together for the following reasons.

Regrettably, women do believe that they are discriminated against in pursuing administrative careers, and they are repeatedly told in interviewing situ-

TABLE 2

BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION* (n=82)

% and Number of Aspirants reporting barriers		Barrier
56%	(46)	Lack experience
55	(45)	Perceive discrimination in the field
38	(31)	Have family responsibilities
33	(27)	Unable to relocate for career
27	(21)	Lack certification
18	(15)	Am unsure of myself and my skills
17	(14)	Lack finances to continue training
17	(14)	Don't hear about openings
12	(10)	Don't hear about openings in my expertise
10	(8)	Lack encouragement from colleagues
6	(5)	Think current job is too good to change
4	(3)	Lack encouragement from family

*Percents do not total 100% because some respondents indicated more than one barrier.

ations that they cannot be hired because they lack administrative experience, a problem they invariably encounter and refer to when discussing instances of discrimination. At the same time, they believe they are not given the opportunity to gain the necessary experience because females are not generally seen as appropriate candidates for administrative jobs. This is a vicious circle. As one woman recalled in an interview for a principalship:

> The only thing against me was that I didn't have any experience; I began to think that that was the way it was going to be everywhere. Who's going to give you the experience? Who's going to trust you?

Although women cited issues such as race, age, and experience for why they were having problems getting hired, the issue of their gender was clearly paramount. When they sought experience, their sex became a factor; when they sought jobs, the lack of experience was brought up. These women were typically not

militant; but because they had adequate qualifications for a least entry-level positions, they often felt frustrated. Even though some women searched for other reasons for not getting hired, the interviews and questionnaires told the same story: as concluded in earlier studies with working female administrators (Taylor, 1971; Paddock, 1977), the main hurdle for female aspirants in administration was their gender.

Motivational Factors for Aspirants

In spite of the numerous barriers in the experiences that female aspirants report, they remain surprisingly committed and motivated to succeed in their goals to become principals. Knowledge about the factors which intially motivated these women to pursue administrative careers enables us to better assess the real or imagined impact of these barriers. Studies that examine only the barriers tend to portray women as passive victims of an unfair and unjust system of public school administration. These studies can obscure the many complex ways in which women actively respond to the barriers they perceive, and they often fail to provide any insight into why many women continue to persist in seeking administrative positions given the barriers. As described in Table 3, most women indicated that a combination of internal and external motivations led them to aspire to administration.

The vast majority of the aspirants (87%) spoke mainly of their personal desire for professional growth and of the challenges administration would be likely to bring to their lives. These women did not report either a "fear of success" or a motive to avoid success, as has been noted in earlier studies (Horner, 1972; Condry and Dyer, 1976; Cherry and Deaux, 1978). Rather, they clearly articulated their aspirations and gave positive assessments of their own skills and abilities to understand and deal with the problems facing public

TABLE 3

FACTORS MOTIVATING WOMEN TO ASPIRE IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION* (n=114)

% and Number of Aspirants		Motivational Factors
87%	(99)	Wanted the professional growth and challenges
83	(94)	Felt I would be a good administrator
57	(65)	Encouraged by boss, administrator
57	(65)	Encouraged by peers, co-workers
54	(62)	Wanted to do something for students in schools
51	(58)	Wanted the better salary of an administrator
47	(55)	Wanted the influence of an administrator
46	(52)	Encouraged by family
40	(45)	Wanted to move out of what I was doing (nearly three fourths of these were teachers)
25	(28)	Wanted the prestige of an administrator
25	(28)	Wanted to be a role model for others
16	(18)	Needed a better career as a result of life change
10	(11)	"Fell into it"

*Percents do not total 100% because several responses were indicated by each respondent.

education. One woman stated:

> Administration gave me an opportunity to exert myself in the sort of leadership fashion that I have always liked. I like working with people, so I feel this role is better suited to me than being in the classroom where I was more limited and didn't have as many opportunities.

Often the women aspirants were motivated by what they saw as poor administration on the part of current administrators, in particular, male administrators. One woman,who only recently decided she would seek a principalship, explained:

> I see some of the male staff members of our staff playing the political game, beating a path down to the principal's office and not really pulling their weight as far as plain good old hard work is concerned. It makes me mad; it irks me. I think, by golly, if they are going to aspire to be administrators, I just better see to it that I do too. Because I <u>know</u> I could do a better job than they can.

Conclusions

In short, women in this study were not inactive or undesirous of administrative positions as some earlier studies imply. On the contrary, they were determined to succeed. They believe they have the experience, the credentials, and the motivation necessary to become tomorrow's principals. One woman explained her determination:

> I have a zest for life that I have always been grateful for; I believe if I keep persisting, I'll succeed. One friend of mine applied for a job and was so disappointed when she didn't get it. Yes, I've felt like that; but I've come beyond it. Now I'm over that hurdle and I'm really trying again.

Getting "beyond the hurdle" requires thinking thoroughly about themselves, about the field of administration and about their own ability to battle the discrimination in the field. These women were not passive in the face of this discrimination, as is so often depicted of women educators in earlier studies. Many of them are aware that their gender alone will probably have a negative effect on hiring committees; but they continue to take the steps necessary to reach the goals they have set for themselves.

The women actively asked questions themselves during job interviews. They have learned to handle, in their own unique ways, the sexist comments and situations they meet day-to-day. They sought advice from interviewers when they didn't get hired, so that the next interview would go that much better. They let people know they felt ready to move into administration, and they sought the mentors necessary to aid them in that process.

In summary, they understood the odds against them, but they refused to be turned back. "I know what I want," one woman exclaimed. "I know how to do it. Just let me do it." They trusted their abilities and qualifications for administration, and they believed in their own intelligence to overcome the obstacles.

One theme dominates all others: their confidence in their ability to do the job and to do it better. Ultimately, this is what moves these women forward. As one aspirant related:

> When I decided to go for this job, I looked around at the kind of principals there were. I thought: Lord, I can do it at least as well as they're doing! If they can, I can.

Eager, experienced and committed women are aspiring to careers in the field of educational administration. No matter what difficulties the field of administration may hold for them, these women are determined, above all else, that administration is what they want.

For further elaboration of this study see two other pieces by the author:

"If They Can, I Can: Women Aspirants to Administrative Positions in Public Schools." In Educational Policy and Management: The Sex Dimension. P.A. Schmuck and W.W. Charters, Jr., eds. Academic Press, New York, forthcoming.

"Female Aspirants in Public School Administration: Why Do They Continue to Aspire to Principalships?" Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 1980.

References Cited

Cherry, Frances and Deaux, Kay. "Fear of Success Versus Fear of Gender-Inappropriate Behavior." Sex Roles, 1978, 4, 1.

Clement, Jacqueline P., et. al. "No Room at the Top?" American Education, 1977, 13, 20-26.

Condry, John and Dyer, Sharon. "Fear of Success: Attribution of Cause to the Victim." Journal of Social Issues, 1976, 32, 2.

Fishel, Andrew and Pottker, Janice. "Women in Educational Governance: A Statistical Profile." Educational Researcher, 1974, 3, 4-7.

Gross, Neal and Trask, Anne E. The Sex Factor and the Management of Schools. John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1976.

Hennig, Margaret and Jardim, Anne. The Managerial Woman. Pocket Books (Simon and Schuster), New York, 1977.

Horner, Matina A. "Toward an Understanding of Achievement-Related Conflicts in Women." Journal of Social Issues, 1972, 28, 2.

Krchniak, Stefan P. "Variables Associated with Low Incidence of Women in School Administration: Toward Empirical Understandings." A paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada, March 1978.

Mansergh, Gerald. "Attitudes of Teachers Toward Women School Administrators and the Aspirations of Teachers for Administrative Positions in the State of Minnesota." Catalyst for Change, 1976, 5, 3.

McCarthy, Martha M., et. al. "Characteristics and Attitudes of Doctoral Students in Educational Administration." Phi Delta Kappan, 1979, 61.

McMillan, Marvin R. "Leadership Aspirations of Perspective Teachers--A Comparison of Men and Women." Journal of Teacher Education, 1975, 26, 4.

Newman, Katherine K. "Stages of an Unstaged Occupation." Educational Leadership, 1980, 37, 6.

Oller [Edson], Sakre K. "Female Doctoral Students in Educational Administration: Who Are They?" Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Report, 1978, 7.

Oller [Edson], Sakre K. "Female Graduates in Educational Administration: Myths and Realities." Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Report, 1979a, 10.

Oller [Edson], Sakre K. "Differential Experiences of Male and Female Aspirants in Public School Administration: A Closer Look at Perceptions within the Field." A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1979b.

Paddock, Susan. "Career Paths of Women Administrators." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 1977.

Reynolds, Betty. "Educators' Career Survey: Questionnaire designed for a Study of Career Aspirations." Detroit, Michigan: Department of Instructional Technology, College of Education, Wayne State University.

Schmuck, Patricia A. "The Spirit of Title IX: Men's Work and Women's Work in Oregon Public Schools." OSSC Bulletin, 1976, 20, 2.

Stockard, Jean, et. al. Sex Equity in Education. Academic Press, New York, 1980.

Taylor, Suzanne S. "Attitudes of Superintendents and Board of Education Members in Connecticut Toward the Employment and Effectiveness of Women As Public School Administrators." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1971.

Weber, Margaret B., et. al. "A Study of Factors Affecting Career Aspirations of Women Teachers and Educational Administrators." A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 1980.